

SURVIVING THE EMOTIONAL PROCESS OF CHANGE

Change is not an event. It is a process.

This process of transition or transformation begins with an ending.

Major organizational change begins with the *death* of the old organization. New management starts with the demise of old mentors and known relationships. New systems bring loss of feelings of competence that come with knowledge of the old system. Flatter organizational structures and increased employee empowerment signal the end of familiar roles and responsibilities. As soon as upper management announces a restructuring, new strategy or launches a new product line, you need to figure out how it changes your situation and your future.

Remember that change has a ripple effect on an organization. Even those events that do not directly involve you may have some personal ramifications. Relatively minor layoff in another department may not directly affect you, but it can mark the end of the no-layoff policy that you have always taken for granted. The closing of a regional office may leave you without the clerical support you have relied on. The hiring of a new regional vice president may bring added pressure to your boss, who in turn increases your work load.

THE CYCLE OF TRANSITION

As endings take place, people get emotional. They go through a process of grieving that is a natural sequence of emotional responses to loss. At the heart of the grieving process is sadness over what people are being asked to leave behind.

Loss hurts. It hurts employees and it hurts the company. Employees grieving over the personal impact of change, or resentful over the loss of their colleagues, find it hard to concentrate on work. Productivity drops while accidents, illnesses, and absences multiply.

Many people want to avoid these painful responses and pretend they are over them. You may find yourself in a situation where you even feel that it is foolish or wrong to feel emotional. Just know that by acknowledging your feelings at whatever state you are in, you will move more quickly through it and on to the next phase. *The emotions of transition are denial, anger, fear, and depression.* Uncomfortable as they may be, they are also the path by which you get to acceptance and commitment.

Denial -- For many employees, the first response to announced organizational change will be denial. This is an expected initial reaction in which hurt people protect themselves from the first impact of loss. When you are experiencing this emotional stage, you feel numb and the change seems unreal. You might try to minimize the change or to ignore it completely. Typically people think:

It will all blow over. It's just a matter of time.

I don't think my job will be affected by all the changes.

Anger -- When people have moved through the numbness of denial, they may begin to feel anger at the organization. When you are angry, resentment can build. Angry employees look for places to direct the blame -- the company, the management or themselves -- for getting into this situation. Typical thoughts include:

I is not going to put up with this -- not without a fight. How could they do this to me? After all I've done for them.

Fear -- Fear and anxiety can rise as employees begin to doubt their ability to deal with an uncertain future. When anxiety runs high, mistakes are made, deadlines are missed. If you are afraid, you tend to pull into yourself and keep a low profile. One employee puts it this way: "I'm keeping my head down and becoming part of the furniture." Other common thoughts include:

What will I do if I get fired?

How am I supposed to do to get work done with all these stupid changes?

Depression -- Like sadness and anger, at some point feelings of depression are to be expected. Depression may be unpleasant and hard to deal with, but it is perfectly normal. While you cannot make it go away, you can go through it and survive intact. Just remember that when you are feeling depressed, you tend to magnify the discouraging aspects of a situation. You may distort the difficulties involved with coping with change. There is an inclination to dwell on feelings of despair and powerlessness, thinking, for example: *There is nothing I can do anyway. I give up.*

When you recognize any of these signs of grieving in yourself, do not suppress them. Rather, look for the appropriate settings in which to express your feelings. The more you acknowledge your feelings and get support for being in transition, the more quickly you will move through it.

PARTING RITUALS

Endings occur more easily if people can find a way to say goodbye to the past. Whether you make a scrapbook of your old company and co-workers or get together with friends to fondly reminisce, the time spent honoring the past is cathartic. It can also be a healthy beginning to releasing the past.

GOING THROUGH THE MIDDLE OF CHANGE

When people have been allowed to express their feelings and to respectfully release the past, they are ready to move on to the next phase of change. In his book, *Managing Transitions*, William Bridges refers to this phase of change as the *neutral zone*. He says that in the neutral zone, "personnel are overloaded, signals are often mixed and systems are in a flux and therefore unreliable." In this chaotic, ambiguous phase, it is only natural that people become polarized between those who want to rush forward and those who want to return to the old ways.

In the middle of change, it may seem that all structure has fallen apart. If so, this is the time to take the initiative and to create your own temporary structure. Schedule activities that give your day a sense of order and stability. Set short-term, achievable goals that will help you to retain a feeling of accomplishment.

In the meantime, do not overload yourself with decisions you do not have to make and with responsibilities you do not have to take on. Pace yourself. Take time out. Schedule a weekend vacation. Leave the building at lunch, and find comfortable places to dine and relax. Practice stress control techniques. Take stock of your priorities and see if they still make sense to you. Keep your sense of humor.

Most of all while at work, focus on the job at hand. Do not allow yourself to become so distracted by the ambiguity of the situation that you stop working. Sure, you do not know exactly how it will all come out. Neither does anybody else. Focus on those things which you have control, rather than become paralyzed by all the things over which you have no control.

EXPLORATION

From the human standpoint, not all large scale change results in less desirable conditions than what was known before. In fact, employees often find themselves with greater responsibilities and opportunities. If you can draw on your positive attitude and creative energy during this period, you will find ways to capitalize on the future. While the middle of change is by nature chaotic, it can also be exhilarating for those who explore new possibilities ahead.

During the exploration phase, energy is released as people focus their attention on the future. In this phase, you will probably want to explore where you stand in the organization, what results need to be achieved and what opportunities lie ahead. Now is the time to make sure you understand the new direction and vision of the organization. It is time to see where this vision aligns with your personal values. It is also an appropriate time to take stock of your special talents and skills and to gauge where they might fit best into the changing situation.

NEW Beginnings

Beginnings are psychological phenomenon's -- another phase of the transition process. Even though it can start at a fixed time -- the new system can be installed, the new boss can report to work, the merger can be completed -- but nothing begins until people are ready to commit to reinvent their emotional energies.

All phases of transition bring pressure and stress to participants. Recognize that you are through with grieving what you have left behind. You have survived the ambiguities of the middle of change. This new beginning might be the perfect time to celebrate. Whether you host a victory party or splurge on a night out in town, take this opportunity to acknowledge and reward yourself.

Working With Continuous Change

CHANGE -- DO YOU FEAR IT, SURVIVE ON IT OR THRIVE ON IT?

"Change is the only constant." The Greek philosopher Heraclitus commented on it 2,500 years ago and currently it couldn't be more true. Change is the most pervasive influence within today's work place. Profound changes are shaking up our lives and the way we do business. And the pace of change is picking up. Accelerated change will continue to be driven by sharp economic swings, new competitive

pressures, new technologies, government regulations, sociocultural shifts, further globalization of the marketplace, and the continued reshaping of businesses worldwide.

Business expert Peter Drucker says, "We are entering a 'post capitalist' era in which organizations will have to innovate quickly and be global." And while companies continue to merge, downsize, and restructure to meet the challenges of globalized competition, the workforce must constantly adjust to the unpredictable. Employees can no longer expect stability. Change has become a fact of corporate life to be accepted and dealt with.

In the 1980s, when I first addressed organizations about workplace change, there was much interest in the topic. Managers and employees alike were looking everyone could get through the change and return to business as usual. Today, when I address national conferences or speak to audiences here and abroad, the message it brings is that change is business as usual.

Take a moment and test yourself. How many of the following changes can you see in your workplace already?

From:	To:
Lively, local competition	Fierce, global competition
Slow change	Accelerated pace of change
Giving/Following orders	Empowerment/Responsibility
Few choices	Multiple choices and options
Product-driven decisions	Consumer-driven decisions
Hierarchical structure	Self-managed work teams
Rugged individual	Team player
Rigid rules	Flexible guidelines
Revere the status quo	Continuous improvement
Moderate skill level	Higher skill level needed
Mass marketing	Niches, specialty markets
Narrow point of view	A total systems view

Paternalistic management	Partnership shared values
Creative top management	Creativity required of everyone
Sequential changes	Overlapping changes

The first step to thriving on change is to accept the world the way it is. Only then can you look for creative ways to make that reality serve you personally and professionally. The following are the "facts" of change as I perceive them.

Change is no longer a force in the business environment. It is the business environment.
Change is global. Organizations everywhere -- in various industries, at all corporate levels, and in every industrialized nation -- are going through change.
The most difficult behaviors to change are those which were responsible for your past success.
The pace of change is accelerating, and if you stand still you will soon be obsolete.
The best time to change is before you have to.
Your reaction to change is totally within your control.
You don't have to like to change to deal with it successfully, but you must accept it.
Almost no one like change done to them: Almost everyone likes change done by them.
If change is inevitable, and you strive for stability, you set yourself up for change to come in the form of a crisis.
The only real security in changing times is that which you develop within yourself.
At least one fourth of all current knowledge and accepted practice will be obsolete.
The life span of new technology will decrease from the current eighteen months.
Women will own over 50 percent of all businesses in the US.
Entire industries will disappear and be replaced by others we haven't heard of yet.

Twenty times as many people will be working at home.
A majority of the entrants to the workforce will be women, minorities, and Immigrants.
Dual career couples will increase to 63 percent of all families.
The growth and development of a one-world economy will further increase global competition.
Organizational structures will undergo further transition.

Source: Archived Articles, Carol Kinsey Goman; Carol Kinsey Goman Consulting www.ckg.com

Accessed: March 25, 3009